

Some of the world's most important natural resources, such as tropical rain forests and coral reefs, are located in areas that can least afford environmental protection measures. Many developing countries with significant foreign debt are forced to exploit their national resources to generate sorely-needed revenue.

It is because of this that Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-FL) and I introduced the Forest and Coral Conservation Act of 2007 last week. This bill reauthorizes legislation that will expire this year which allows developing nations to swap foreign debt payments to the U.S. in exchange for environmental conservation programs. The bill also expands the program to all marine habitats and forests, which will enable non-equatorial countries to participate.

By giving nations an economic incentive to stop environmental degradation, we will be more responsible global citizens. All ecosystems are interconnected - action now will help ensure that our planet doesn't lose invaluable environmental treasures.